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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA419, ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE ERUPTS ON NICARAGUA'S

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA419**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA419	2008-04-09 15:02	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758464.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4102/estrada-y-la-ldquo-doble-cara-rdquo-ante-ee-uu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4041/millones-de-dolares-sin-control-y-a-discrecion>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MANAGUA 000419

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PLS PASS TO USAID LAC
DEPT FOR WHA/CEN GREENE AND NYMAN
DEPT FOR DRL G. MAGGIO
DEPT FOR USOAS
DEPT FOR INR/IAA EMERSON
NSC FOR V ALVARADO
SOUTHCOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE ERUPTS ON NICARAGUA'S
ATLANTIC COAST AS GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. MANAGUA 416
[1](#)B. MANAGUA 297
[1](#)C. MANAGUA 105 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4(B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On Friday, April 4 violence erupted in Nicaragua's North Atlantic Autonomous Region's (RAAN) capital of Puerto Cabezas between local government-backed opponents of municipal elections and supporters of elections. Initial reports that at least two pro-vote supporters died in the clash proved untrue. However, at least 30 were injured -- several seriously -- including two gunshot victims and there was sporadic violence throughout Friday. On Friday evening, the Supreme Electoral Council finally announced it would delay RAAN local elections by six months (until April 2009), citing the lack of "technical conditions" to hold the elections. The CSE decision appeared to be another manifestation of the "Pacto," the unspoken power-sharing agreement between Ortega and former President Aleman, with Aleman loyalists voting for formation of a quorum and then against the final decision. The situation in the RAAN remains tense. As of Tuesday morning, upwards of 100 riot police maintain watch over the airport, mayor's office, and governor's office. Representatives from both sides have filed formal judicial complaints and leaders from nearby RAAN municipalities and the Autonomous South (RAAS) have criticized the government for suspending elections and provoking violence. While the opposition and civil society mobilize to turn the decision around, it is not clear how effective they will be. END SUMMARY.

Friday, April 4 - Violence Erupts
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Early on the morning of April 4, Liberal deputies Enrique Quinonez, Jose Pallais, and Victor Duarte flew to Puerto Cabezas to meet with local leaders about the impasse over the government's pending decision to cancel municipal elections in the region scheduled for November. Following their arrival, the deputies were detained at the airport by 500-700 government-backed opponents of elections armed with rocks, sticks, and some guns. Eyewitnesses report that the

pro-FSLN regional governor and the mayor of Puerto Cabezas were personally directing the crowd's activities. Assembled a few miles away, between 200 and 400 pro-election supporters were gathered in the central park to receive the deputies. Upon hearing that anti-vote forces were preventing the deputies from leaving the airport, the pro-vote supporters marched to the landing strip. At the airport, violence broke out almost immediately, as anti-vote supporters began throwing rocks and beating pro-vote supporters with sticks as they tried to clear a way for the deputies to leave. The situation escalated and eyewitnesses report that shots were fired and that at least two people were believed dead. (Note: the two individuals are reported to be gravely wounded and were transported to hospitals in Managua. One individual is reported to be on life support and not expected to survive. End Note.)

13. (C) The deputies were ultimately able to leave the airport and later met with an interfaith religious commission which presented them with a letter urging that elections go forward as originally planned. (COMMENT: The Moravian Church withdrew from the coalition at the last minute, despite supporting the letter the evening before, and declared that the church neither opposed nor supported elections. This last-minute change was made after Church Superintendent Cora Antonio departed for the U.S. Other Moravian board members were caught off guard and the other denominations were bitterly disappointed. The Moravians pledged to restate their support upon Antonio's return to Nicaragua. END COMMENT) Shortly after deputies departed the city, pro-election supporters attacked both the Town Hall and the regional governor's offices. They broke into the mayor's office, where they reportedly ruined several computers and

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drove everyone out of the building. Eyewitnesses report that police and pro-vote supporters exchanged fire for several minutes around 2pm local time.

14. (C) On Friday afternoon, an estimated 100 riot police arrived by air from Managua and were immediately dispatched around the city, including to the governor's office. As of Monday, April 7, the riot police were still in Puerto Cabezas guarding the airport, the governor's office, and the mayor's office. They also reportedly monitored an assembly of approximately 500 pro-vote supporters who gathered in the central park on Saturday afternoon. Sources report that the riot police have not taken any aggressive measures, but are simply guarding and watching. By Friday evening, and following the CSE decision, most people had gone home and a relative calm settled over the city. The situation remains calm but tense, with small-scale demonstrations but no violence reported.

CSE Postpones Municipal Elections

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15. (C) At 8:30 on Friday night, CSE Magistrate Roberto Rivas announced that municipal elections in three municipalities in the RAAN, Puerto Cabezas, Prinzapolka, and Waspam, would be suspended for six months (until April 2009) because of the absence of "technical conditions." Rivas also cited the violence as a reason for the CSE to take the decision on an urgent basis. The vote was 4 to 3, with all FSLN magistrates plus Rivas voting in favor and all three PLC magistrates voting against. However, in a move later criticized by many of their own party leaders, the PLC magistrates voted for a quorum and to hold a vote on the suspension of elections. PLC Deputies, including Enrique Quinonez and Maximino Rodriguez, told us such a decision could not have happened without the express authorization of Arnaldo Aleman and have publicly and privately criticized the decision. Aleman defended the decision of the magistrates to uphold quorum, calling those who criticized the PLC magistrates as "innocents" and noting that the FSLN magistrates could have simply convened their "suplentes" to convene a quorum. In a

move likely to create more tension and political wrangling, the CSE also announced that it will name interim authorities to govern the municipalities once the current office holders' terms have finished.

Next Steps

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¶6. (C) According to Javier Williams, a prominent Atlantic Coast opposition politician, and several contacts in Puerto Cabezas, the police have begun systematically passing through the city to confiscate video recordings and erase digital pictures of the airport violence that demonstrate that Rivera's armed supporters opened fire on pro-vote supporters. They report that efforts are being made to keep people away from the media for fear they might further implicate Rivera, the governor, and the mayor. In addition, contacts report that the police are making every effort to maintain the peace, even promising material assistance in exchange for cooperation.

¶7. (C) In addition to ongoing media campaigns, both anti- and pro-vote forces are reaching out to allies in other municipalities in the RAAN and the RAAS looking for support. The South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) Regional Council, together with the mayor of Bluefields, the capital of the RAAS, and other civil society groups has finalized a statement condemning the election delay and blaming Rivera, Yatama, and the FSLN for the violence. Liberal leaders from the Mining Triangle cities of Rosita, Siuna, Bonanza, and Mulkuku, in the interior of the RAAN, traveled to Managua on Monday -- along with National Assembly deputy Victor Duarte -- to meet with both the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) and Vamos Con Eduardo (VCE) deputies to gain their support against election delays. Several leading deputies, including

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Justice Committee Chair and PLC member Jose Pallais, have said the Assembly will take a number of steps, including legislation demanding that the CSE respect the original election date, filing injunctions against the CSE decision, and continuing to hold legislation the Ortega Administration wants hostage.

¶8. (SBU) Civil society is also increasing its vocal opposition to the decision. Movimiento por Nicaragua is planning demonstrations in front of the CSE's Managua headquarters and reaching out to other NGOs to encourage them to participate as well. Mayoral candidate and anti-FSLN Yatama leader Osorno "Blas" Coleman and Williams are trying to mobilize the participation of several hundred Miskito Indians from the RAAN living in Managua. In addition, they are trying to coordinate simultaneous protests in Bluefields, Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, Prinzapolka, Rosita, Siuna, and Bonanza.

Comment

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¶9. (C) Friday's violence in Puerto Cabezas and the decision by the CSE to cancel elections on flimsy political and legal grounds has raised the stakes in Nicaragua's struggle for democracy. The rapid and violent response of pro-election advocates in the RAAN appears to have shocked FSLN leaders, but not stopped them from pressing forward with what was clearly a previously planned decision to suspend the elections.

¶10. (C) Ortega and other senior members of the administration have publicly advocated suspension of the elections for weeks under a wide range of weak excuses. In addition to claiming ongoing damage from Hurricane Felix, Ortega has suggested that there "might be more hurricanes in the future." Other government supporters suggest that the current electoral system does not give proper respect to indigenous rights. Regardless, the clear motivation behind the suspension is

two-fold: 1) the FSLN and their Yatama affiliates would likely lose the three municipalities due to deep resentment among voters over the failed hurricane response and every municipal victory will count in what is expected to be a referendum on Ortega in the November municipal elections; and 2) as noted in ref A, there are personal financial motivations at stake among senior FSLN leadership from timber and property concessions that would be jeopardized should they lose control over the municipalities. These dual motivations drove the CSE to act, and the outbreak of violence, whether orchestrated or not, delivered them the pretext to act sooner rather than later.

¶11. (C) While the events have stirred civil society and political opposition, it remains to be seen whether the election suspension will generate further cooperation and solidification within civil society and the opposition movement at a national level. Individually, many of their leaders have told us that the suspension of the elections represents a grave threat to democracy and the rule of law. If the CSE can take these decisions, in defiance of electoral law, the Constitution and the National Assembly, they suggested, there would be little to stop them from doing the same or worse in other municipalities. However, it is not clear whether civil society and the opposition will be able to sustain their effort or overturn the CSE's decision. Moreover, if Aleman was prepared to have his CSE magistrates support the FSLN in the decision to suspend the elections, he will be unlikely to allow PLC deputies or other judges to go too far in their efforts to overturn the decision.

¶12. (C) We also believe that the election suspension is just the FSLN's first step in re-drawing the political map of the RAAN and dismantling representative democracy in that poverty-stricken region. During an April 3 dinner in honor of visiting Finnish Trade and Cooperation Minister Paavo Vayrynen, Vice Foreign Minister Valdrack Jaentschke suggested

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that the elections should be suspended due to: a) the damaged psyche of the RAAN peoples; b) the need to not let the elections intrude when reconstruction falls into full swing later this year; and c) the need to reconsider the importance of indigenous participation in the electoral structure. Jaentschke observed that timber in the RAAN and RAAS should eventually be a USD 200 million a year business and hearkened back to the Coast's "glory days" in the late 19th century when timber, gold and other extractive industries were king. He further suggested that the current municipalities' geographic size "is too big to manage." Other FSLN leaders on the Coast describe elections and private property as "merely Western constructs." We believe the FSLN's long-term vision for the RAAN is clear -- more smaller towns separated by giant swatches of indigenous communal lands whose resources are controlled by tribal and community leaders -- and exploited by FSLN-linked firms.

TRIVELLI